

## Overview of the AEIOU Framework for Evaluation

### 1. **Accountability: Did we do what we said we were going to do?**

Accountability questions attempt to determine if the activities listed in the goals and objectives of the project have been accomplished in a timely fashion and met the specifications regarding people, materials, and other elements that were identified in the plan. The emphasis in this component is on the completion of the activities or objectives, not on determining their quality or outcome.

Data used to answer these questions can be obtained through a review of project records, products, and materials, or can be provided by individuals involved in the plan.

### 2. **Effectiveness: How well were the activities accomplished?**

Effectiveness questions look past the fact that the activity was done and attempt to determine how well specific activities were done. These questions are directed at placing value on the activities.

Data collection methods may include surveys, interviews, focus groups, participant journaling, knowledge tests, and performance tests. The data source most often used in this component is participants or stakeholders in the plan.

### 3. **Impact: Did the project or plan make the desired difference?**

Impact questions focus on results. These questions are aimed at identifying changes that resulted from the project and are generally tied to the stated outcomes of the project.

Data collection methods vary and include both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Methods could include surveys, interviews, focus groups, record data, observations, performance-based measures, standardized tests, and policy analysis. It is important to recognize that direct measures of impact are not always possible and indirect indicators may be used.

### 4. **Organizational factors: What structures, policies, or events in the organization or environment helped or hindered the project in accomplishing its goals?**

Organizational context questions focus on identifying those contextual or environmental factors, policies, or events generally beyond the control of the project's participants that contributed to or detracted from the project's ability to complete activities. Evaluation of factors that act as boosters or barriers to successful operation or implementation of the project is important in helping explain why the project did or did not operate as planned. Not taking these factors into account may, at the very least, give an incomplete picture of the success of the project, and at the most, an inaccurate picture of its success.

The evaluator might examine the organizational structure of the project or look at institutional policies and procedures in order to identify those that made it easier for the project to accomplish its goals or those that made it more difficult or impossible to achieve project goals. Often, qualitative data are relied upon in looking at organizational context. Interviews of key personnel, focus groups made up of those impacted by the program, and document analysis are examples of data collection methods.

### 5. Unanticipated outcomes: What changes occurred as a result of the project that were not planned or expected?

An unanticipated outcome is similar to impact in that both are looking for what changed as a result of the project. However, while impact questions focus on the planned changes, here the focus is on things that happen or change as a result of the project that were not planned or anticipated. These unexpected changes may be of either a positive or negative nature.

Data collection methods are often qualitative and may include interviews, focus groups, journals or surveys that solicit narrative information. Unanticipated outcomes, sometimes serendipitous, sometimes not, can provide information that is helpful in determining the success of the project and can also be used to identify future directions for the project or ideas for new projects.

The AEIOU Framework is a commonly used evaluation tool. Much of the wording for this handout is from:

Learning at a Distance in South Dakota: Description and Evaluation of the Diffusion of a Distance Education. Michael Simonson and Tamara Bauck.